Knocking on Europe’s door

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How narratives of fear, insecurity and nostalgia shape collective perceptions of immigration

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We ought to reflect on courage to banish fear
(Baruch Spinoza)

Europe's founding ideals

In March 2012 former Bonn correspondent for *The Observer* Neal Ascherson gave a lecture at the British Museum about Europe, its pasts and its possible future for the London Review of Books (Ascherton 2012). The topic was not uncharted scholarly territory, and yet besides the freshness of Ascherton's first hand observations deriving from spending many years in Germany,

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which taught him: 'not to sneer when young Germans said earnestly that they felt European, not German' because 'Europe to them meant neutrality, reconciliation, open frontiers,' there was a lot more of interest to his lecture. It evoked the history of Amikejo, 'a tiny sliver of land between Belgium and Germany which had been overlooked by the surveyors as they drew new European frontiers after the fall of Napoleon' (Ascherton 2012)[1]. The significance of this story, first narrated in a Polish novel and then corroborated by the American historian Steven Press (2010), is for Ascherton that it represented an example of how 'a tiny Europe could exist *sans frontières*, or at least without enforcing them.' It was 'a wormhole through time into our Europe of the Single Act and the Maastricht Treaty. No customs barriers, no closed frontiers, military conscription almost a memory, no national currency' (Ascherton 2012). Another overlooked episode in Europe's political history, Ascherton points out, regards the Resistance Spring between 1943–48. Resistance movements to totalitarian regimes put forward a vision of post-war Europe which was remarkably different from the technocratic model of statesmen like Jean Monnet and Robert Schumann, theirs was a federal Europe of the People of Europe. That vision, Asherton notes, 'originated in a document drawn up on the Italian island of Ventotene by three men, Altiero Spinelli, Ernesto Rossi and Eugenio Colorni, who had been interned on the island along with some 800 others opposed to Mussolini's regime' (Ascherton 2012). The Ventotene Manifesto, written on cigarette papers and concealed in the false bottom of a tin box, in order to be smuggled off the island had at its core the following ideal 'A free and united Europe is the necessary premise to the strengthening of modern civilisation, that has been temporarily halted by the totalitarian era' (Ventotene Manifesto 1941). Such an ideal went

[1] For maps of Amikejo see (Jacobs), no publication date available.

on to influence the Manifesto of the European Resistance which read:

> The Federal Union must be based upon a declaration of civil, political and economic rights which would guarantee democratic institutions and the free development of the human personality, and upon a declaration of the rights of minorities to have as much autonomy as is compatible with the integrity of the national States to which they belong (Draft Declaration of the European Resistance Movements 1944).

In the UK competing and contrasting visions of the European political project and of European 'ideals' and 'values' have long coexisted, from the Ventotene-inspired one of Winston Churchill who, in 1948 declared:

> We hope to see a Europe where men of every country will think as much of being a European as of belonging to their native land, and that without losing any of their love and loyalty of their birthplace. We hope wherever they go in this wide domain, to which we set no limits in the European Continent, they will truly feel Here I am at home. I am a citizen of this country too.

Before concluding: 'the aim and the design of a United Europe, whose moral conceptions will win the respect and gratitude of mankind and whose physical strength will be such that none will dare molest her tranquil sway,' (Churchill 1948) to Margaret Thatcher who, in an often quoted passage declared: 'Europe is not based on a common language, culture and values … Europe is the result of plans. It is in fact, a classic utopian project, a monument to the vanity of intellectuals, a programme whose

inevitable destiny is failure; only the scale of the final damage done is in doubt' (Thatcher 2002, 359).

It is hard to miss the extraordinary topicality of the above contrasting perspectives, as they perfectly illustrate how the 'idea' of Europe and its founding 'values' has not only shifted over time – not exclusively in the UK – but also how such shifts underpin what I define as the *narratives of fear, insecurity and nostalgia* which are shaping European public opinion's perception (and EU policies) of immigration. It is exactly such shifts which explain the contradictions and apparent lack of unanimity with respect to what such values are in the view of Europeans themselves. In August 2015 German Chancellor Angela Merkel called for EU action on the migrant crisis, suggesting that 'If Europe fails on the question of refugees, if this close link with universal civil rights is broken, then it won't be the Europe we wished for' (*Oman Observer* 2015).[2] As recently as January 9th, 2018 Guy Verhofstadt warned in a tweet that 'We should be wary of narratives based on the defence of so-called "national values", which are used to mask racist hate campaigns fuelling anxiety against migrants and refugees' followed by the #ValuesFirst.[3] More on such narratives later, in the meantime suffice to note that Germany has taken the lead, presenting itself as the *Weltmeister* in the refugee crisis, while also asking for pan-European solidarity (in the form of a redistribution of refugees across the Union), a value Germany inexplicably seemed not to endorse in the case

[2] It is worth remembering that in 2013 the then UK Justice Secretary, Chris Grayling, and the Home Secretary Theresa May started lobbying for the UK to quit the European Convention of Human Rights, a decision that Ken Clark, former Justice Secretary, described as a 'political disaster', because it would unravel 'fundamental liberties established under Europe's post-second world war settlement' (Bowcott 2013).

[3] Guy Verhofstadt (@guyverhofstadt) is President of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe group in the European Parliament and Brexit coordinator for the European Parliament.

of the Greek economic crisis (from late 2009 – ongoing). The country has since 2015 struggled to cope as the first destination of choice for the world's economic migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, to the point that plans of housing some of them in the Buchenwald barracks, a former Nazi concentration camp have been considered. History, as philosopher Emil Cioran once wrote, is 'irony on the move' (2010, 152).

While the watershed moment in public opinion caused by the powerful photograph of a dead Syrian child on a Mediterranean beach is welcome, it is unacceptable for EU policies in this area to follow the fickly, populist[4] moods of the national electorates. This is exactly what has happened with regard to the immigration debate, which not only has conflated crucial legal distinctions between a migrant, a refugee and an asylum seeker,[5] but also has predominantly reflected the views of the populist mob over those of the democratic crowd. As an example of the former I shall consider neoconservative political commentator Douglas Murray (2017) who in a video aptly, from his point of view, entitled "Europe belongs to Europeans"[6] links the current refugee crisis to the Jewish one during WW2 while attacking (Holocaust survivor) businessman George Soros for advocating a 'Europe without

[4] An examination of populism is beyond the scope of this article, however it is relevant in this context to mention political economist Francis Fukuyama, who identifies three causes for the rise of populism: 1) globalization 2) weakening of decision making and 3) cultural anxiety. (Münchrath & Rezmer 2017.) Also it is alarming that 'populism is more widespread than previously assumed. … and debates in tabloid media are not more populist than debates in elite media' (Rooduijn 2014). See also Rooduijn 2015.

[5] According to a study by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation prior to the Brexit referendum people 'talked about migrants, refugees and asylum seekers interchangeably', and 'felt that immigration created pressure on public services, in which they and their family were likely to lose out' (Walker 2016). See also Smith 2015.

[6] The comments to the video are representative of the intended audience and its distorted and ultimately ignorant view of European history.

borders' which would, as a consequence, attract 'mass migration from the third world' (Murray 2017). The images used in the video are a roughly assembled remix of WW2 footage depicting Jewish refugees and rose-tinted, nostalgic views of Europe from the 1950s with white young women happily sipping wine on a sunny day, followed by iconic images of British national identity (Buckingham Palace), before pictures of Houellebecq's novel *Submission* (to which I shall return later) and Muslims praying are introduced. The video concludes with a plea: not to give up the only home Europeans have due to 'pangs of guilt' they might feel for the continent's colonial history and past behaviour towards the Jews. Burke's famous quote 'history is a pact between the dead, the living and the yet to be born' is hijacked to remind Europeans of their duty towards future generation not to transform their societies ('we don't wish Stockholm to look like Mogadishu!'), while the very last images linger upon street riots, the collapse of the Twin Towers and an ISIS execution for maximum emotional impact.

This is not the place to analyse in depth the root causes of current international conflicts and what is only the latest chapter in humanity's history of migration and refugees crisis.[7] It might be worth recalling though that political scientist Samuel P. Huntington in the article "The Clash of Civilizations?" (1993) put forward a theory according to which:

> the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating

[7] The late Zygmunt Bauman observed that 'History braids continuity with discontinuity; those two qualities are in an "and-and," not an "either-or," relation. Each chapter of history simultaneously preserves and innovates. The current refugee crisis is *not* – can't be – an exception to this rule. … "Being another chapter" does not mean that there is *nothing* different taking place' (Bauman 2018, 1–3).

> source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.

Dystopian narratives of fear

I don't fully share Huntington's theory[8], however I do believe that literature provides us with the most useful insights into the cultural underpinnings of the complex political phenomena of our time. *The Camp of the Saints* (Raspail 1973) a French apocalyptic novel depicting a not too distant future when mass migration leads to the destruction of Western civilisation, eerily foreshadows current discussions about European (Christian) values, and their national variants – British values, French (Republican) values and so forth. *The Camp of the Saints* tells the story of a poor Indian demagogue, named 'the turd-eater' because he literally eats shit, and the deformed, psychic child who sits on his shoulders. They lead an 'armada' of 800,000 impoverished Indians, inhumanely described as 'wretched creatures', sailing to France. European politicians, bureaucrats and religious leaders, including a liberal pope from Latin America, debate whether to let the ships land and accept the Indians or to do the right

[8] Criticisms of the clash of civilizations thesis, which I share, is best summed up as follows: 'The epistemological critique condemns the clash of civilizations thesis on grounds of its realist, orientalist and elitist outlook. The methodological critique attacks its monolithic, inconsistent and reductionist/essentialist attitude while the ethical critique denounces it for being a purposeful thesis that fuels enemy discourse and, in the process, becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy' (Shahi 2017).

thing – in Raspail's view – recognize the threat the migrants pose and kill them all. As a consequence of the Indian invasion all the non-white people of Earth, the book poses, will rise up and overthrow white Western society. In the end the French government gives the order to repel the armada by force, but it is too late because the army has no will to fight. What was feared happens, the Queen of England is coerced into marrying her son to a Pakistani woman; the mayor of New York is forced to house an African-American family at his official residence, while the defenders of white Christian supremacy all end up dead. As it has been rightly noted (Blumental & Rieger 2017), the book suggests that 'The white Christian world is on the brink of destruction … because these black and brown people are more fertile, while the West has lost that necessary belief in its own cultural and racial superiority.' Ultimately, '*The Camp of the Saints* – which draws its title from Revelation 20:9 – is nothing less than a call to arms for the white Christian West, to revive the spirit of the Crusades and steel itself for bloody conflict against the poor black and brown world without the traitors within' (Blumental & Rieger 2017). As Raspail wrote in the Afterword to the 1982 edition of the novel: 'Our hypersensitive and totally blind West … has not yet understood that whites, in a world become too small for its inhabitants, are now a minority and that the proliferation of other races dooms our race, my race, irretrievably to extinction in the century to come, if we hold fast to our present moral principles.' The end result for Raspail will be 'the certain immolation of France … on the altar of an aggravated utopian humanism' and the deterioration of '"Republican values" … *ad infinitum*' (Raspail 1982, 317).

In December 1994 *The Atlantic Monthly* dedicated its cover story to the novel. The piece is so relevant that it might have been written today. Here is its sobering conclusion:

> One thing seems to us fairly certain. However the debate unfolds, it is, alas, likely that a large part of it – on issues of population, migration, rich versus poor, race against race – will have advanced little beyond the considerations and themes that are at the heart of one of the most disturbing novels of the late twentieth century … (Connelly & Kennedy 1994).

It has been noted that a 'Camp of the Saints-type invasion' has become Stephen Bannon's – President Trump's former chief strategist – favourite metaphor to describe the largest refugee crisis in human history (Blumental & Rieger 2017). Bannon is not alone in adopting 'Camp of the Saints-type' *topoi*, right-wing commentators Pat Buchanan (2002) and Ann Coulter (2016) rehearse similar themes in their books. For Buchanan the USA is a conglomeration of peoples with almost nothing in common facing the dangers of: declining birth rates, uncontrolled immigration of peoples of different colours, creed and cultures and a rise of anti-Western culture antithetical to established religious, cultural and moral norms. Such works contribute to a narrative of fear that feeds on the anxiety of white America and exploits it for political gains.

Earlier I noted that Douglas Murray's video included a reference to Houellebecq's novel *Submission* (2015), in the context of the plea to Europeans to preserve Europe as their home. Perhaps more explicitly than in the case of *Camp of the Saints*, *Submission* which features the election of an Islamist to the French presidency, against the backdrop of a disintegration of Enlightenment values, is 'one of those exceptional instances when politics and art arrive simultaneously' (de Bellaigue 2015). In fact it was an extraordinary coincidence that on the same day of the *Charlie Hebdo* fatal shooting, Houellebecq's controversial novel was published and the author himself, represented as a

wizard predicting a near future of dental decay and Ramadan celebration, was on the cover of the satirical magazine.

Submission, which Houellebecq defined as 'political fiction' (in Bourmeau 2015) is set in 2022 when far right wing politician Marine Le Pen has just lost the presidential election to the fictional Islamist leader of a new Muslim party. France swiftly becomes an Islamic patriarchal society, women are forced to leave the work force and wear a veil; liberty is curtailed but, crucially, there is more security.

The novel is written from the perspective of a male literature professor whose progressive personal decadence (as a new convert to Islam he enthusiastically welcomes his right to better pay and polygamy) mirrors the decadence of his country (France) and of Western civilization. 'As time went on,' he reflects, 'I subscribed more and more to Toynbee's idea that civilizations die not by murder but by suicide' (Houellebecq 2015, 213).

The 'suicide' of Western civilization is due, in the words of another new convert (who also extols the virtues of polygamy) 'to the simpering seductions and the lewd enticements of the progressives, the Church had lost its ability to oppose moral decadence, to enounce homosexual marriage, abortion rights and women in the workplace … Europe had reached a point of such putrid decomposition that it could no longer save itself …' (Houellebecq 2015, 230–31).

As it was the case for several of Houellebecq's previous novels, *Submission* also stirred controversy, some described the feeling of having been 'tarnished' by his writing which transmits hate, xenophobia and fear (Gary 2014),[9] while others

[9] In his open letter Gary (2014) pertinently asks: 'Tu pouvais pas mettre ta plume au service d'une réconciliation, plus que d'une division ?' ('Couldn't you put your pen at the service of reconciliation rather than division?' *translation mine*)

credited Houellebecq with having the same visionary quality of George Orwell and Aldous Huxley (Carrère 2015). In his study dedicated to Houellebecq's whole *œuvre* Louis Betty (2016) interprets *Submission* not as an Islamophobic novel, but rather as an 'apologetics for a modern, Westernized Islam' that can 'return humanity to a religiously grounded order (17). For Betty Houellebecq's novels are 'morally compelling fables of the psychosocial horrors of materialism' that explore 'the individual and collective … consequences of God's death' (46). Betty's interpretation seems to be confirmed by the author himself when, in an interview, he declared the end of the Enlightenment – 'the Enlightenment is dead, may it rest in peace' – and affirmed his Comtean view of the world, 'I don't believe that a society can survive without religion' (Bourmeau 2015). Later in the interview Houellebecq unconvincingly dismisses the hypothesis that *Submission* reflects Renaud Camus' theory of the 'Great Replacement'[10] – that is Muslim immigrants thanks to demographics are 'colonising' France, 'mutating' the country and its culture permanently – because his book is neither about race nor immigration.

Pressed by the interviewer as to whether the plot of *Submission* 'takes us into the politics of fear' Houellebecq concedes, 'Yes, the book has a scary side. I use scare tactics' (Bourmeau 2015). One of most scaring aspects in the novel, in

[10] On Renaud Camus' 'The Great Replacement Theory' see http://www.great-replacement.com/. and the video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMxhMtv1qvE from July 2016 where he connects Donald Trump's views on immigration to his theory and to the fears of replacement.

Unsurprisingly, 'The Great Replacement Theory' is very popular with Alt-Right activists like Lauren Southern who discusses this 'serious subject' in the following video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTDmsmN43NA and the torch bearers, neo-Nazi activists who marched on University of Virginia's grounds in Charlottesville, shouting, 'You will not replace us,' and 'Jew will not replace us' in August 2017.

my view, is how quickly the protagonist is ready to entertain a complete reconsideration of the values of Western morality, particularly with regard to equality between the sexes. *Submission* is an unashamedly misogynistic text, 'Certainly a feminist is not likely to love this book. But I can't do anything about that' (Bourmeau 2015), Houellebecq acknowledges, before adding, 'I show how feminism is demographically doomed. So the underlying idea, which may really upset people in the end, is that ideology doesn't matter much compared to demographics' (Bourmeau 2015). As it has been perceptively observed 'Houellebecq's plot seems totally unrealisable, and yet there is truth in his moral tableau' (de Bellaigue 2015), this is exactly where, I would suggest, the topicality of the book lies, *Submission* is an admonitory tale, one that demonstrates how complacency and self-assurance can blind us to the loss of what we have come to view as permanently acquired (individual) rights.

Brexit and the visual politics of fear

I would argue that the dystopian prefigurations considered above with their toxic mix of fear for the future and nostalgia for the past have found new vigour in the visual propaganda of the Brexit Leave campaign.[11] Interestingly, post-referendum data has shown that: those who voted Leave had the least exposure to migrants, while those with the most exposure to them were most likely to vote Remain, hence 'It was *fear* of immigration, not immigration itself, which led the Leave camp to victory – not

[11] On the crucial role of images in political campaigns see Schmuck and Matthes (2017). I share the authors' conclusions that 'more media literacy programs which inform citizens about the process of stereotyping through political ads are required.'

the *reality* of migrants, but the *idea* of them' (Travis 2016). How could this possibly happen? Visual culture scholar Ray Drainville (2016) has provided an astute analysis of several key images used by the Leave campaign, starting with the 'profoundly deceptive' Breaking point billboard which showed a long queue of brown-skinned migrants on their way to Britain, with the caption 'We must … take back control of our borders.'

The deceptiveness resided in the fact that the picture, taken by Glaswegian photographer Jeff Mitchell,[12] was of migrants moving across borders in Eastern Europe, not coming to the UK but, as Drainville (2016) notes, 'its intention was not to be journalistically accurate; it was meant to evoke fear, specifically of an uncontrollable mass of people' who happen to be brown-skinned. 'People moving into and across the European Union include those of many different ethnicities,' Drainville acknowledges, 'but the image here reduces the larger complexity, homogenizing the mass into a gigantic, monolithic Other.'[13] Also, as it was quickly noted, the billboard was strikingly similar to Nazi propaganda, where a long queue of Jewish refugees are described as 'parasites undermining their host countries' (Stewart & Mason 2016).

Drainville (2016) considers also another flyer available on the Leave campaign web site, in this case:

[12] With regard to his photograph being used by the Leave campaign Mitchell commented: 'Photographers are there to record stories, as they happen and when they happen, in the best way we can. But what happens after that, how our images are used, can be out of our control, especially in the digital age – which is unfortunate, particularly in this case' (Beaumont-Thomas 2016).

[13] Sociologist S. Seidman has rightly argued that 'The concept of the Other must be analytically distinguished from that of 'difference' … Otherness is fundamentally about cultural denigration and exclusion … The Other inhabits an existential space between the human and non-human' (2013, 3–6).

> There is virtually no difference in color between countries they claim are "set to join" the EU (such as Turkey) and one that has nothing to do with the EU (Iraq). Syria is also highlighted, albeit in a slightly different shade, but the suggestion that it may also be set to join is there (again, it's not). What's more, the graphic doesn't simply imply that the populations of these countries will soon enter the EU. The figures of people concentrated in this area are all pointed, with a massive, gradient-hued arrow, toward the UK. The imagery is strongly reminiscent of one of the original forms of data visualization: battlefield maps. An arrow is just as much a part of the visual language of invasion as a photograph of a lengthy queue of people who look different from "us." (Drainville 2016.)

In fact, we are aptly reminded, 'invasion arrows were used in the introduction to the British World War II TV comedy *Dad's Army*,[14] which was popular in the 1970s – among those aged 45 or over, the largest population to vote Leave' (Drainville 2016).

Interestingly, Drainville expands upon the criticism received by the rhetoric used by the Leave campaign by recalling philosopher Jennifer Saul's concept of the 'figleaf'

> which differs from the more familiar dog whistle: while the dog whistle targets specific listeners with coded messages that bypass the broader population, the figleaf adds a moderating element of decency to cover the worst of what's on display, but nevertheless changes the boundaries of acceptability. The example Saul uses to illustrate the idea is Donald Trump's infamous description of Mexican immigrants to the US "bringing

[14] See the *Dad's Army* Appreciation Society web site which features in its logo the arrow of the Nazi invader http://www.dadsarmy.co.uk/.

> drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists" – and then he introduces his figleaf, the "get-out" clause: "And some, I assume, are good people."[15]

For Saul the linguistic drift of increasingly intolerant speech can lead to racist violence, 'as our standard of what is acceptable to say (or not say) shifts, which in turn opens up possibilities for how we may act' (Drainville 2016).

To prove the soundness of Saul's insight one only needs to consider that following the Brexit referendum there has been a spike in hate crimes across the UK (Dearden 2017).[16]

Fig. 1 Hate Graffiti
photo taken by Paul Roberts outside the Health Centre in Torquay, UK (reproduced with permission)

The intolerant rhetoric of the referendum campaign is not an unexpected occurrence, rather the latest rehearsal of traditional racist *topoi* about the threat posed by the (brown) Other, or simply by any Other. Over several decades the British popular press has provided incessant negative coverage of EU-related

[15] With regard to the 'Dog Whistle' concept see (Haney López 2014).

[16] Since the Referendum hate crimes have been collected on social media under the hashtag #PostRefRacism, See also the Twitter handle @ PostRefRacism for resources on reporting an incident.

matters and exploited every xenophobic immigration cliché, thus perpetuating old fallacies while stirring new fears. Researchers found negative coverage of the EU increased from 24 per cent to 45 per cent between 1974 and 2013, at the 'expense of positive and neutral coverage' (Copeland & Copsey 2017). So it is hardly surprising that, according to an Ipsos Mori study "What Worries the World" (Anonymous 2016) Britain was the country most concerned about immigration than any other polled. The reason for such fear resides, for Barbara Gibson, in the fact that 'even though there are differences between the BBC and the *Express*, during the EU referendum campaign they all have driven a narrative of conflict, which inflates fear and creates the feeling of "us against them."' (In Anonymous 2016.)[17] The root cause of such behaviour for Gibson is that 'the UK, its government and media are "interculturally incompetent"', which means that they view British culture as ethnocentrically superior. Thus, immigrants have become synonymous with 'crisis', they abuse the social benefit system, 'grab' the natives' jobs and ultimately, similarly to the armada in *Camp de Saints*, they are described as an unstoppable 'flood' unless appropriate measures are taken. This was the scope of the 'Return' pilot scheme of 2013 which involved two advertising vans with the slogan 'In the UK illegally? Go home or face arrest' and a phone number for people enquiring about repatriation to call.[18]

[17] See also Groh and Vishwanath (2016).

[18] I first discussed the 'Go home' vans in a blog post (Notaro 2013). This article is the culmination of reflections on fear, security and immigration initiated then.

The securitization narrative

I believe that there is a common thread of intolerance which links the 2013 'Go home' vans to the xenophobic billboards of the Leave campaign, only the former ones made use of a 'fig leaf', to echo Saul's concept, represented by the legal versus illegal immigrants distinction, (not all immigrants are bad, only the illegal ones, the legal ones are tolerated) – such a distinction might be missed by the general public. Also, as it has been noted: 'The vans employed a close-up image of a border guard's uniform and handcuffs, the juxtaposition of this imagery aligning the Home Office publicity with a securitisation narrative seen to be played out in "the fortification of state borders [and] more aggressive forms of border surveillance and policing"' (Jones 2017, 5).

As Didier Bigo (2002) has persuasively argued:

> Migration is increasingly interpreted as a security problem … the popularity of the security prism is not an expression of traditional responses to a rise of insecurity, crime, terrorism … it is the result of the creation of a continuum of threats and general unease in which many different actors exchange their fears and beliefs … the professionals in charge of management of risk and fear … transfer the legitimacy they gain from struggles against terrorists, criminals … towards other targets, most notably … people crossing borders, or people born in the country but with foreign parents. This expansion of what security is taken to include … results in a convergence between the meaning of international and internal security … particularly important in relation to the issue of migration, and … who gets to be defined as an immigrant (63–92).

Security framing adds another crucial element to the narrative of fear drawn up in this article, in fact as political analyst Jeff Huysmans acutely observes, if one frames refugees as a humanitarian question one allows for compassion, whereas framing the same issue as a security question 'sustains fear of refugees and policies of territorial administrative exclusion' (2006, xii). Moreover, understanding practices of securisation in Europe in relation to migration is a welcome development in security studies particularly if such a framework includes a consideration of language as playing 'a central role in the modulation of security domains' (8).[19] For Huysmans the politics of fear plays an important role in structuring insecurity. Securisation is a political and administrative rendering of a domain of policy and politics in which fear of outsiders 'is both a political currency and an organization principle … it manages detrimental political effects by focusing on dangerous outsiders … it buys political and professional legitimacy' (52).

This is because 'Fear is not simply an emotion that security framing instigates in social relations' Huysmans posits, 'It is … an organizing principle that renders social relations as fearful. An important characteristic of this principle is that it arranges social relations by objectifying an epistemological fear of the unknown through the identification of existential dangers' (54).

Therefore, Huysmans concludes 'the politics of insecurity is always also a politics of knowledge that is not simply about what is dangerous but also about sustaining the epistemological certainty that what is identified as dangerous is indeed dangerous' (54). Links between security politics and identity politics are also established in Huysmans' work, in particular on the issues of European and/or Western values and their

[19] This is an important point which chimes with this article's interest in the role of language, both in its visual and textual expression.

contradictions discussed at the start of this article. Huysmans notes how 'articulating an Islamic threat, for example, facilitates nurturing an idea of unity without having to make its concept explicit (52).[20]

The nostalgia narrative

The reference to 'nurturing an idea of unity' is a suitable conduit to the final piece of the narrative puzzle under construction here, that is the role that nostalgia plays in 'nurturing' false truths about the past, while fuelling contemporary political agendas.

Svetlana Boym (2007) distinguishes between two types of nostalgia: 'Restorative nostalgia does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition' whereas 'Reflective nostalgia dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity. Restorative nostalgia protects the absolute truth, while reflective nostalgia calls it into doubt' (13). Boym highlights an inherent paradox in modern nostalgia, in that,

> the universality of its longing can make us more empathetic towards fellow humans, and yet the moment we try to repair that longing with a particular belonging – or the apprehension of loss with a rediscovery of identity and especially of a national community and unique and pure homeland – we often part ways with others and put an end to mutual understanding. *Algia* (or longing) is what we share, yet *nostos* (or the return home) is what divides us (9).

[20] Huysmans' reflections are reminiscent of Foucault's conceptualization of the *monster*, the one whose very presence violates the laws of society and threatens the accepted 'order of things' (Foucault 2005).

As observed elsewhere (Notaro 2018), the above passage is not only persuasive, but exemplary in its understanding of contemporary intolerance towards migrants and related, misguided intentions to build walls, 'unreflective nostalgia can breed monsters,' (10) Boym writes echoing Goya's motto for his famous etching "The Sleep of reason produces monsters" of 1799. For Boym it is apropos that the 'global epidemic of nostalgia' has appeared when we are at most fascinated with cyberspace and the virtual global village. In fact 'there is a yearning for a community with a collective memory, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world.' In this sense, nostalgia works as 'a defence mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals (10). The historical upheaval most relevant to our discussion regards what I earlier described as the latest chapter in humanity's history of migration and refugees crisis. On this issue Zygmunt Bauman (2018) pertinently remarked that it was Umberto Eco who asked the crucial question: 'Is it possible to distinguish immigration from migration when the entire planet is becoming the territory of intersecting movements of people?' Eco's reply: 'What Europe is still trying to tackle as immigration is instead migration. The Third World is knocking at our doors, and it will come in even if we are not in agreement … Europe will become a multiracial continent – or "colored" one … That's how it will be, whether you like it or not'. Bauman then recalls Ulrich Beck's observation that 'we have been, collectively, cast in a cosmopolite situation (in the sense of becoming irretrievably dependent on each other and bound to exercise reciprocal influence) but we haven't yet started in earnest to develop … a matching cosmopolitan awareness' (Bauman 2018).

To expand upon Beck's insightful comments, I would suggest that just like we have still to develop legal, ethical and cognitive frameworks to deal at best with contemporary (and forthcoming)

technological advancements, we also urgently require a new *global understanding* of social phenomena like migration (in Eco's definition of the term). The globalization of economic markets has not been tantamount to the cosmopolitanism of the marketeers' minds. Only intercultural competence, to use Barbara Gibson's definition, can sustain such 'heroic migration narrative' and save us from the pitfalls of 'restorative nostalgia', the kind of which is behind the description of plans for Britain's post-Brexit trading relationship with the Commonwealth as 'Empire 2.0,' or a minister's preposterous claim, in a tweet, that 'The United Kingdom, is one of the few countries in the European Union that does not need to bury its 20th century history' (Andrews 2017). It is restorative nostalgia that underpins the obsession with 'decline' or decadence which in countries like France has become a booming industry (Donadio 2017).[21] The power of (restorative) nostalgia as a historical emotion cannot be underestimated, hence it becomes even more pressing to debunk the myths on which it is based and construct alternative narratives, this is exactly the task of scholars, novelists and artists alike. I find political scientists Christina Boswell and James Hampshire's suggestions particularly useful when they argue that false beliefs about immigrants

> will not be shifted by bombarding voters with data, since people rarely change their minds when presented with contrary evidence. *Paradoxically, therefore, a more rational debate about immigration cannot be purely rationalistic*. Instead, politicians who want to challenge ignorance and prejudice need to construct narratives about immigration and its place in our society which

[21] Although not mentioned in Donadio (2017), one could include Houellebecq's *Submission* among the spate of books describing a narrative of French decadence. It is also worth noting that the word 'déclinisme,' or 'declinism,' entered France's Larousse dictionary in 2016.

> draw on existing public philosophies of openness and inclusion. These public philosophies do exist and they have been mobilized in the recent past. They can and should be resuscitated (*emphasis mine*) (2017).[22]

In line with the need for new migration counter-narratives is Shada Islam's exhortation to all countries across the globe 'to develop a new, more heroic migration narrative in which diversity is lauded and living together is not only viewed as necessary, but also embraced' (2017).

Debunking myths

A myth in urgent need of being debunked is the one according to which 'large swaths of displaced populations – from Syrians to Nigerians and Afghanis to Eritreans – are picking Europe as their destination of choice. As international security expert Vicki Squire (2017) points out, 'research … indicates that this assumption is a myth. While some people do of course leave their homes in order to reach Europe, many do not. This myth needs to be rejected so that the wider public debate on migration can move beyond a politics of fear'.

Fear finds its best expression in dystopian narratives, *à la Camp de Saints* where past mythologies about national identity are mourned and 'decline' inspired ones *à la Submission* and yet, as novelist Moshin Hamid notes, 'One thing that art and literature can do is imagine futures for us'. Unfortunately what we are seeing at the moment, he continues, is 'a failure of imagination.

[22] Ford (2018) has noted that 'the data suggest the electorate is more receptive to a positive case for migration than it has been for many years – yet these polling findings are not widely known and discussed'.

No-one is articulating plausible desirable futures for us as human beings. What we are hearing articulated is dystopias – that life will be terrible in the future – or vehemently nostalgic, divisive, chauvinistic visions' (in Green 2017). Hamid has contributed himself to an alternative narrative about migration with his latest novel *Exit West* (2017) which reflects his firm belief that 'inevitably humanity is going to come to a place where the notion that people can move and choose where they live will be thought of as a right that is as fundamental as the right to speak as we want or worship as we want' (in Green 2017).

Some artists have taken to task the EU migration policies with regard to the right to freedom of movement for everyone, in fact they have argued that, by ignoring article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which reads: 'Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state,' a 'necropolitics of leaving some [migrants] to drown, others to be turned back' has come about.[23] This is an interesting point which connects to the initial discussion about Europe's founding ideals and values, and shows how the EU legal framework (the European Convention of Human Rights 1953), might not be perfectly aligned with universal ideals of human rights.[24]

However, art itself is not immune from inconsistencies when tackling as sensitive a topic as migration, this is what emerges from Maya Ramsay's "Reframing the debate: The art of Lampedusa" (2016) which considers the art that has been produced in relation to the subject of migrant deaths at sea, with a focus on artworks that refer to the island of Lampedusa. Critics

[23] This is the concern underpinning many of the artistic works produced in the context of the AHRC financed programme "Responding to Crisis: Forced Migration and the Humanities in the Twenty-First Century" (Chambers 2017).

[24] I don't intend to labour the legal issue, however it is worth referring the reader to Ahmed and de Jesús Butler (2006).

and audiences alike have been divided as to whether some of the work produced has turned into a tourist attraction, not to mention the ethical issues tied up with making art from objects that belonged to dead migrants, or simply the work has been deemed not 'aggressive enough' in light of the scale of the migration tragedy. Even renowned artist and political provocateur Ai Weiwei has not been immune from criticism when he posed as drowned toddler Aylan Kurdi to raise awareness of the plight of Syrian refugees.[25] I don't fully share some critics' 'wider critique on the ability of contemporary art to deal with such sensitive subjects' (Dabashi quoted in Ramsay 2016), in fact in spite of the occasional sensationalism there are plenty of artistic examples which address the migration tragedy with the universal *pathos* that it deserves. This is the case of Maya Ramsay's own *Countless project* (2016–18), which includes a series of graphite rubbings made from the graves of unnamed migrants who died whilst trying to reach Europe by boat,[26] and Mimmo Paladino's *Porta d'Europa* (*Door to Europe*). In Ramsay's own description of the piece:

> Installed in 2008 … this open portal symbolizes both a warm welcome towards migrants and a modern day 'Door of No Return'. With its enticing golden surface *Porta d'Europa* combines both beauty and horror. At the top of the gateway are a series of jumbled numbers,

[25] In a video for the UN Refugee Agency, Ai Weiwei stated: 'Refugee issue is not a local or regional issue. It's a human rights issue, it's about fundamental values which touch everybody' (Cafolla 2016).

[26] The Countless project can be viewed at https://www.mayaramsay.co.uk/work.php?s=countless-graves. Also commendable was the European Commission-funded research project on "Museums in an Age of Migrations" (2011–15) reflecting EU concerns about migration as a critical issue for Europe, http://www.mela-project.polimi.it/. One of the contributors, Christopher Whitehead (2018), writes in particular about the implications of using lifejackets as exhibits to think through immigration in museums.

> '98357345'–, referring to the unknown numbers of migrant deaths. Heads, hands, shoes and broken bowls project from the sculpture, like archaeological finds unearthed from the seabed … *Porta d'Europa* functions as a memorial on the island, a place for people to gather and to reflect on the subject – as the doors to Europe close ever tighter (Ramsay 2016).

Emanuele Crialese's *Terraferma* (2011) is another successful example. Set in the beautiful island of Lampedusa the film tells the story of a poor family of fishermen who defy the law of the state, according to which only the local police patrol can rescue illegal immigrants at sea, and follow the traditional 'Law of the Sea' thus becoming unwitting criminals. The moral dilemma that the Lampedusa fishermen, (and Europe), face is reminiscent of the one rehearsed in the classic tragedy *Antigone* by Sophocles. According to the Law of the state Antigone's brother, viewed as a traitor, could not be buried and yet in a scene that has lost none of its poignancy, under a bright mid-day sun Antigone wildly flings handfuls of dirt on the rotting corpse of her slain brother declaring that 'great unwritten, unshakable traditions' take precedence over the laws of the state. In *Antigone* Sophocles asks which law is greater, the gods' or man's; in devising our migration laws, the film seems to suggest, we should make sure that the moral imperative of one does not come into conflict with the algid, in-humane character of the other.

In conclusion, this article has demonstrated how narratives of fear, insecurity and nostalgia contribute to construct a distorted image of immigration which exploits comprehensible anxieties with regard to European and national identities in order to achieve specific political aims (as in the case of the Brexit Leave campaign). The article has also crucially hinted at broader debates concerning the distinction between immigration and

migration (as identified by Umberto Eco) and illustrated some examples of *counter-narratives* in the form of scholarly and artistic interventions which have the potential to debunk myths and challenge prejudice.

Spinoza's words which served as an epigraph to this piece remind us that 'we ought to reflect on courage to banish fear', however courage alone might not be sufficient what the messy boundaries of Europe require are a sense of common purpose and a renewed 'cosmopolitan awareness' (Beck 2006) based on dialogue and imagination. Europe must re-articulate its Ventotene-inspired founding values of respect for political and civil rights within a legal framework that speaks the universal idiom of human empathy, so that no human being knocking on its door could ever be declared illegal.

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